

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding HB 4822.

My name is Terra Walters, I am a founding member of Decoding Dyslexia- Michigan, a parent-led grassroots movement in all 50 States and 4 Canadian Provinces concerned with the limited access to educational interventions for dyslexia within the education system.

Our families have firsthand experience supporting struggling readers within Michigan public schools. Our collective experiences demonstrate that dyslexia is an under-recognized, underestimated root cause of reading failure that doesn't have to be an academic death sentence.

We have also learned the hard way that it must be *explicitly* acknowledged and accounted for in any plan or policy that attempts to improve reading scores.

Legislation to address the literacy crisis in our state cannot exclude a condition that impacts the majority of struggling readers: According to UM DyslexiaHelp in Ann Arbor, [70-80% of people with reading difficulties are likely to have some form of dyslexia](#). Some people may have more mild forms, while others may experience it more severely.

Based on [estimates](#) from Yale and the National Institutes of health, dyslexia affects between 71,000 - 240,000 students in Michigan. Yet only about 26,000 students qualify for special education services under the category of SLD, which includes dyslexia and related learning differences.

Acknowledging dyslexia specifically provides a compass toward improved instruction for the majority of struggling readers.

In order for children to overcome this common challenge to literacy, they don't need more harsh consequences, they need:

- To be identified promptly.

As Kyle Redford, education editor of the Yale Center For Dyslexia & Creativity says, *"Tragically, with all we know about dyslexia today, too many educators still whisper the word, too few students get identified early, and many don't get identified at all."*

We can [accurately identify](#) those who are at-risk for dyslexia as early as preschool; and identify dyslexia as early as 1st grade. Early, intensive, and systematic intervention can help a student keep up and retain his grade level in school, as well as minimize the negative effects of dyslexia.

- Access to intervention [strategies that work](#):

The common experience of our members is that even if children do qualify for some intervention, the approach and the methods that are employed in our schools are not evidence-proven to meet the needs of children with this profile.

The [content and instructional practices](#) that characterize an effective approach are derived from a body of time-tested knowledge and practice that has been validated over the past 70 years, and from scientific evidence about how persons learn to read and write. It is not more difficult than current practices, it's just more effective

- Highly Trained Teachers:

The overwhelming majority of students with dyslexia spend most of their day in general education

with teachers who have received little or no instruction about dyslexia. According to UM DyslexiaHelp in Ann Arbor, Only 1 in 10 dyslexics will qualify for an IEP.

The devastating lack of awareness about dyslexia among educators and other specialists in a position to give guidance to parents means that a large percentage of students with this treatable condition remain unidentified and the rest are diagnosed later than the ideal window for early intervention.

When it comes to intervention, proactive parents educate themselves and seek help. They quickly learn that the teams in our schools often lack even a baseline understanding of dyslexia, let alone how it may be successfully treated. They find educators hostile to the term and unwilling to acknowledge the guidance of national experts.

- **They need accommodations and assistive technology.**

Technology solutions and accommodations that level the field for kids with atypical profiles are often withheld when these things are one of the most obvious and implementable tools available to support struggling readers.

Accommodations must be provided to ensure that the student's ability, not his or her disability, is being assessed and to reduce frustration.

Dyslexia is a mechanical disability, not a thinking disability. There is absolutely no relation between dyslexia and IQ. Our children neither deserve nor can they afford to be exempt from literacy, but they should be exempt from ineffective instruction and interventions.

Social promotion vs. retention is a red herring debate. Both are bad. By the time you are considering holding a child back, the school has been already been failing him or her for years, with missed opportunities to apply what works. Promoting kids doesn't correct that. Neither does repeating more of the same bad intervention.

We urge you to consider the devastating impact of a policy that sets so many children up to fail by not requiring our schools to address dyslexia ... and then punishes them when they do not learn.

Science has progressed in bringing understanding and clarity to dyslexia. HB4822 must call for educators in Michigan to catch up and put this powerful knowledge to work so that all children in Michigan can learn to read and write and achieve to their potential.

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GRANT CLARK, dyslexic, GRAND RAPIDS
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